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AUTHOR Kirkpatrick, T. A.
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ABSTRACT

Singapore's grammar-based English language syllabus and the wide range of native languages and English oral ability among secondary school students make the second language teaching situation complex and the use of the communicative approach challenging but not impossible. While grammar is an essential element of second language proficiency, it is not sufficient in itself. The grammar-based and communicative approaches are often complementary, and fluency exercises are an important correlate to communicative grammar teaching. Communicative teaching has the additional advantage of helping school children develop cross-cultural awareness and learn communicative strategies of the language to be learned. However, additional materials designed to help Mandarin speakers learn certain English communicative strategies, especially those of information sequencing, would be helpful. (MSE)

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The Role of Communicative Language Teaching in Secondary Schools — with Special Reference to Teaching in Singapore

T. A. KIRKPATRICK

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Introduction

In this paper I want to consider the advisability and/or applicability of communicative language teaching in secondary schools in Singapore. First, therefore, I shall say a little about the secondary school population and then briefly describe the secondary school English Language syllabus.

There are about 175,000 secondary students in Singapore. The majority of these attend schools where English is the medium of instruction. Indeed, by 1987, English is planned to be the medium of instruction in all schools and Mandarin, Malay and Tamil will be taught only as second languages. The exception to this, the nine so called Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools, allow students to take both English and Mandarin at L1 level in the 'O' level exams.

Although the vast majority of secondary schoolchildren attend schools where English is the medium of instruction, it would be misleading to suggest that they all speak English equally as well. In some schools the students come from home backgrounds where English is literally the mother tongue and it makes sense to talk of these children as being L1 speakers of English. On the other hand, there are many students who have first come into contact with English in any meaningful way only as a language of instruction in primary schools. The exposure these children get to English in their own homes may be minimal and although the school timetable indicates that English is their L1 and, for example, Mandarin their L2, practically speaking they are more fluent users of Mandarin — their school L2 — than they are of English — their school L1. To make matters more complicated, some may be happier using Hokkien or another dialect of Chinese than either Mandarin or English.

In other words then, there is an enormous range of English

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speaking ability among Singapore secondary school students. This has obvious implications for English Language teaching in Singapore. Mr Li's English Language class may comprise students who are to all intents and purposes native speakers of English while Miss Soh's English Language class may comprise students who are to no intents and purposes native speakers of English. In addition, mixed ability classes are not uncommon.

These points taken with the usual variables — but no less important for being usual — such as the motivation and attitudes of teachers and students, the aptitude of teachers and students, the previous learning experiences of teachers and students, class size, four year courses or five year courses and so on, make the language teaching situation in Singapore a deliciously complex one.

Against this complex situation we must now place the Singapore secondary school English Language syllabus. This syllabus, or more correctly, these syllabuses as there is one for the four year "Express" 'O' level course and another for the five year "Normal" 'O' level course, list(s) grammatical items that are to be revised or taught in each school year. A typical extract from these lists is : (Ministry of Education, Singapore, 1983)

GRAMMAR

Items to be Revised/Taught

Review

Remarks

Revise all the tenses taught in Secondary 1 and 2 (see pages 15-16 and 25-26), but at a higher level of language use, i.e., with more difficult vocabulary and longer texts.

1. TENSE AND ASPECT

Simple Present

for • habitual activities

• universal statements

Sequence of tenses is very important and exercises should draw pupils' attention to this:

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- actions or states occurring at the moment of speaking
- future actions

Present Continuous

- for
- actions taking place currently or at the time of speaking
 - future actions

Simple Past

- for
- completed actions with or without the mention of a definite time
 - conditional sentences
 - past habits
 - reporting speech in which simple present is used.

Past Continuous

- for
- continuing past actions
 - reporting speech in which present continuous is used

Present Tense

Changi Airport, Singapore, is one of the largest and most modern airports in the world. For many visitors to Singapore it is their first sight of the country, and it is certainly an impressive one.

Exercises should also include those where a combination of tenses is used because of content:

Present and Past Tenses

When she was a young woman, with hardly any money, Charlotte Brontë, a nineteenth-century writer, worked as governess and a school-teacher. Perhaps this is why she made the heroine of her most famous novel, *Jane Eyre*, a governess, too.

Present and Present Tenses

Under the Chinese lunar calendar, years are divided into cycles of 12, each one represented by an animal. Legend has it that Buddha summoned all the beasts in creation before one new year

• building up an atmosphere in description

Present Perfect

for • completed past actions

• past action which extends to the present

• actions recently completed

Past Perfect

for • showing a shifting back of time sequence

• reporting speech containing the present perfect

— but only 12 animals showed up. And to each of them Buddha offered a year which was to bear its name.

In addition to these lists, the syllabus includes notes and comments on the importance of listening comprehension, oral production, reading skills and writing skills, but I think it would be fair to say that the basis of the syllabus is grammatical. It is beyond the scope of this paper to argue for or against such a syllabus and to risk repeating much of what was said at last year's seminar on syllabus design. Rather what I want to do is consider the role communicative language teaching can play in Singapore secondary schools given the situation in schools outlined above and the syllabus with which teachers and materials writers have to work.

To what Extent can Communicative Language Teaching 'Work' with a Grammar Based Syllabus?

Few people have argued that "knowledge" of grammar is unimportant for language learning. On the contrary, grammar has been

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seen as very important for learning a language as Comenius pointed out in the seventeenth century.

All languages are easier to learn by practice than from rules. But rules assist and strengthen the knowledge derived from practice (quoted in Stern 1983, p. 78).

A more recent quote, this time taken from Keith Murrow, Communicating involves using appropriate forms in appropriate ways. The acquisition of forms is therefore very important (Johnson and Morrow 1981, p. 63).

As implied in these quotes, however, it has been widely recognised that language learning requires more than learning grammar and this remark of Melan's suggests that courses that concentrated too much on grammar drew criticism.

How fortunate the Romans were that they had not to learn the Latin language, because, if they had done so, they would never have had time to conquer the world (quoted in Kelly 1985, p. 312).

Certain methods of teaching grammar have also received their share of criticism and for many years as evidenced by this quote of Lemare.

Though sentences are made up of discrete units only a fool would dream of teaching the units of language one by one. No mother ever tried it that way with her children so why try it in the classroom? (quoted in Kelly 1985, p. 48).

The point I wish to make here is that it is not in any way controversial to argue that if a person wants to be able to speak a language well, then he must at some stage master the grammar. We can safely say that mastery of grammar is necessary for the mastery of language. We must also quickly add that although it may be necessary it is not sufficient. This fact is implicit in the remarks made by both Comenius and Morrow referred to above. The controversy stems not from the importance or not of grammar but stems instead from the questions of how grammar is best learnt and taught and of how grammar and using the language be best combined in language learning and teaching.

There has been no shortage in the past of people or schools or methods of the "I'm right, you're wrong" variety who have claimed to have found the answer to these questions. For example consider this claim of Stack's made in 1964:

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Today's foreign language teaching is achieving success unknown under the traditional methods. This has been accompanied by the application of structural linguistics to teaching, particularly in the realm of proper sequence, oral grammar, inductive grammar and the use of pattern drills to give intensive practice.

In passing, it is interesting to note that today's foreign language teachers are arguing about what the proper sequence is or whether there is any need of sequencing at all, are still arguing about the inductive-deductive dilemma and are probably dubious about the efficacy of pattern drills.

The methods from grammar-translation to direct to audio-visual have all been influential, had their partisan adherents and have all contributed something to foreign language teaching. Despite their contributions, however, none have proved flawless or foolproof and there has been a shift away from "the method". In more recent years, "the method" has been replaced by what could be called teachers' handbooks. An early example of an excellent handbook is Wilga Rivers' *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*.

One of the consequences of this shift from method to handbook has been the increasing number of teachers who use an eclectic approach rather than rigorously applying a method. This in turn has led to more interest in language learning and teaching principles and, it has to be said, a certain amount of confusion among trainee teachers who want to be given the "right" method to teach with. Teacher trainers are also becoming confused, even desperate, as they attempt to keep up with the rapidly developing fields of linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, educational linguistics, to say nothing of language teaching itself.

The shift then has been away from a prescribed method. One of the goals of those currently engaged in language teaching and language learning research is in H.H. Stern's words

...to suggest a more differentiated and more empirically sustained view of language teaching which can be consistently and comprehensively applied to the great variety of situations in which second language teaching occurs (Stern 1983, p. 495).

I would now like to turn to the question I raised earlier — to

what extent can communicative language teaching 'work' with a grammar based syllabus? In answering this question we can go some way to deciding whether communicative language teaching can be "consistently and comprehensively applied to the great variety of situations in which second language teaching occurs".

Communicative language teaching is an idea or a set of principles that owes much to a social view of language and to the concept of communicative competence described by Hymes (1976). The goal of communicative language teaching is to produce people who are communicatively, not merely, linguistically competent.

Among the principles of communicative language teaching is the message is as important as the grammatical forms that convey the message. Implied in this is that teachers should show genuine interest in what a child says, reads or writes.

This looks like a fairly challenging principle for the Singapore secondary school teacher who has to follow a scheme of work based on the syllabus and which requires the teaching of, say, the present perfect continuous in week three. In other words, is it possible to teach the present perfect continuous — this grammatical item was deliberately chosen as it usually sends a shudder down the spines of teachers when they see it looming — following this principle? I think it is. Below is the transcript of some material written to teach the present perfect continuous. It is the transcript of a short interview with a fictitious — although based on a real one — anthropologist called Professor Grimble:

THE INTERVIEW

- Interviewer : Tonight I'm pleased to welcome in the studio Professor Norbert Grimble. Professor Grimble has been studying the Tamil aborigines of Butterfly Island. Professor Grimble, how long have you been studying the Tamil aborigines?
- Professor Grimble : I've been studying them for a long time....for about thirteen years.
- Interviewer : I see, and have you been living with them for all that time?
- Professor Grimble : Oh, no ... I've only been living with them for about two years.

Interviewer: Ah...and how long have they been living on Butterfly Island?

Professor Grumble: They've been living there for generations...for several hundred years...at least since the thirteenth century.

Interviewer: Is their way of life changing at the moment?

Professor Grumble: It certainly is...for example, parents have been sending their children to schools on the neighbouring mainland for many years, whereas before, they didn't have any formal education.

Interviewer: Has this affected life on the island?

Professor Grumble: Oh yes, indeed...you see, people have been leaving the island in order to go to school, but they've not been coming back...In fact they've been leaving so fast that there are now only a few families left for me to do any research on.

Interviewer: Well, I suppose that unless you finish your research quickly, there won't be anybody left for you to do your research on?

Professor Grumble: Yes...I'm afraid that's absolutely right.

(Interlink 3, 1982)

In the first instance this can be used as a listening comprehension exercise and the students given worksheets to help them take notes of the interview. In other words, at this stage, the focus of the interview is the message it contains. There is no need at this stage for the teacher to draw the students' attention to the frequently repeated use of the present perfect continuous. The students' sole task is to understand the message being conveyed.

After the students have completed the first task, the teacher has a choice of activities that he can ask the students to perform. He can provide a second worksheet that requires students to note down the exact words used in an excerpt from the tape. The teacher can also provide the students with question and/or answer cues so that they can work in pairs and run through the dialogue. Clearly, at this stage, the teacher is manipulating the activities so that the grammatical form of the present perfect continuous is highlighted, and many might therefore argue that these activities can hardly be called communicative. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, the relationship between

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the teaching of form and the teaching of use is the subject of much debate. Using material in the first instance to concentrate on the message it conveys and in the second instance on the form that conveys the message may be one way of combining the two. Add, having used the material in this way, the teacher can now proceed to the third stage of the lesson which could require pair work set up in the following way.

Student A : You are an interviewer with SBC radio. You host a show called "My Guest Tonight". Your guest tonight is Professor Thimble. Professor Thimble is very interested in fish. He has been studying the "blind fish" of Iran for years. These fish live in underground rivers in Iran.

Find out :

1. How long he has been studying these fish.
2. If he lives in Iran and if so how long he has been living there.
3. How long the fish have been living there.
4. Any special characteristics of the fish.
5. Any problems he has.
6. Any other information that might be of interest to your listeners.

Student B : You are Professor Thimble. You are the guest on SBC's radio programme "My Guest Tonight". You are a specialist in the blind fish of Iran. These fish live in underground rivers and have been living there for centuries. They are not really blind — they just do not have any eyes as they have been living in darkness for so long they have stopped 'growing' eyes as they do not need them. You've been studying these fish for 22 years, but have only been living in Iran since 1979.

The fish population is dying out as the locals have recently developed a taste for them — and have therefore been catching great numbers of them. Answer the interviewer's questions. Be prepared to provide any information that you think might interest the listeners.

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After a minute or so in which each student studies his role and can ask the teacher for any clarification he may need, students A interview students B. At a later stage, the teacher might tape some students and play it back to the class. The teacher could also ask the pairs to write out their dialogues.

This lesson on the present continuous can therefore be divided into at least three stages. The first stage is a listening comprehension and the focus is on the message. The second stage has a structural focus which gives students practice in using the form. The third stage comprises a task the main focus of which is communicative but which provides a context where the present perfect continuous can be used where appropriate.

It might be interesting at this stage to compare two examples of material. The first was written for Singapore and based on the Secondary One syllabus. The second was written by Krashen and Terrell and appears in their book *The Natural Approach* (1983). Both materials deal with adverbs of frequency.

Example 1 : In a similar activity, the students use adverbs of frequency to describe their eating habits.

How frequently do you eat the following foods? Use (1) a lot (2) sometimes (3) almost never (4) never for your answers.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. For breakfast I eat: | 2. For lunch I eat: |
| a) eggs | a) a sandwich |
| b) ham | b) spaghetti |
| c) cereal | c) fried potatoes |
| d) hamburgers | d) a salad |
| e) beans | e) fried chicken |
| f) bananas | f) pancakes |

The follow-up teacher-talk is similar to the previous activity on beverages:

Who eats eggs for breakfast? How do you cook your eggs? Does anyone like soft boiled eggs? Who eats meat in the morning? What kind? Why are certain meats preferred for breakfast? Why not? Does anyone eat hamburgers for breakfast? Why? Why not? Bananas?

The Natural Approach (1983)

The point I would like to make here is that the materials written for a grammar based syllabus do not markedly differ from the materials written to exemplify the Natural Approach. In other words, materials written for a grammar based syllabus can be seen as "communicative" as those written for an approach whose authors would strongly argue is not based on a grammatical syllabus. It would appear then that communicative language teaching is suited to both a grammar based syllabus and the 'Natural Approach'.

This may be an appropriate time to introduce a further principle of communicative language teaching which is "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" (Johnson and Morrow 1981, p. 44). Communicative language teaching is less concerned with language as a series of individual sentences or grammatical items and more concerned with language as a whole.

Now, simply because the grammatical syllabus lists a series of items to be taught in any one year does not necessarily imply that the teaching is based solely on grammatical parts rather than the language as a whole. I suggest that two criteria can be adopted which will help students work with language as a whole. The second of these criteria — the use of what Brumfit (1982), among others, has called fluency exercises — will form the next section of this paper. I shall end this section of the paper by discussing the first criterion which is that lessons should be linked in a more or less obvious way.

The antithesis to this is represented by the timetable that has Reading Comprehension down for Tuesday between 8.15 and 9.25, has Grammar down for Wednesday between 12.25 and 1.00 and Composition Writing down for say Friday between 11.50 and 1.00.

The problem with this type of timetable is that it encourages both teachers and students to think of language as being compartmentalised into discrete components, and little effort is therefore made to link the lessons in any way. It is not uncommon to come across a situation where, for example, the reading comprehension deals with some form of narrative adventure, while the grammar introduces "going to" and the composition lesson requires the children to write a description of "My Best Friend". Now it seems to me that teaching English to secondary students is in itself a challenging enough task and does not need additional teacher or timetable made obstacles. I also feel that teaching English to secondary school students can be made more successful by making sure that a series of

lesson is linked, that the skills are linked and that a series of lessons has a goal that can be identified by both teachers and students. Instead, therefore, of requiring students to read a passage and answer questions on it simply because it is the reading comprehension lesson, students should be reading a passage because it contains information or deals with a topic that will help the students perform a later task. This later task could well be a composition. Similarly, the grammar item from the syllabus being introduced or revised that work could occur in the reading passage. This is not to say that reading passages need to be adulterated and crisscrossed with the particular grammar item. It is to say that it makes more sense to select, where possible, a reading passage in which the grammatical item occurs naturally than to select a reading passage in which the grammatical item does not occur. It also seems to me more sensible to provide the students with a writing task where the grammatical item could be used naturally, than to ask them to complete a writing task which will 'prevent' the use of the grammatical item.

In this section of my paper I have tried to show that the principles of communicative language teaching can work with a grammar based syllabus and that the teaching of grammatical items can be dealt with in a communicative way.

In the next section of the paper I shall turn to the role that communicative language teaching can play in providing vital additional learning tasks to complement its grammar teaching role.

The Role of Fluency Exercises and the Grammar Based Syllabus.

"Whoever wants to speak well must murder the language" (Jeppesen 1904). To put this another way, we could say that whoever wants to be able to speak a language well must try and speak it. This, in turn, means that the learner must try and speak the language before he can speak it well. This, in turn, means that the learner is going to make mistakes when he tries to speak the language.

Fluency exercises are those designed to encourage the learner to speak and to communicate and to try and handle the language as a whole. Such exercises tend to be task based where students have to communicate with each other in order to complete a specific task or to solve a problem.

Below are some examples of such exercises.

Example 1

Group Work An expedition to Nepal

Next month there will be an expedition to Nepal. The expedition will last for one month. The purpose of the expedition is to trek through the mountains of Nepal and to find out as much as possible about:

1. the bird life of Nepal
2. the animals of Nepal
3. the flowers of Nepal
4. the people of Nepal

So far three people have been chosen to go on the expedition.

They are: Bill — the expedition leader and an expert on birds

Kwang Ming — the cook

Florence — an expert on flowers

The expedition needs two more people but five people have applied.

Study the details of each of these five people and choose two of them to join the expedition. You must give reasons for your decisions.

The five candidates

Name	Age	Skills and Hobbies	Experience	Other Information
Dixon Lee	16	1. Good at climbing 2. Excellent cook 3. Interested in photography and animals	Went on an expedition to the Sahara desert last year.	A very serious person. He often complains about things.
Mavis Ng	17	1. Good at climbing 2. Fond of painting 3. Very knowledgeable about animals	None	A very cheerful person. She gets along well with other people.
Mok Mui Pin	16	1. Good at climbing 2. Fond of cooking	Has completed First Aid course.	A very organised person. He is rather impatient. Afraid of insects.

Raymond Tan	17	3. Very knowledgeable about flowers 1. Good at climbing 2. Fond of photography 3. Interested in people	Has completed First Aid course.	A quiet but popular person.
Kwang Yong	15	1. Good at climbing 2. Interested in people 3. Very knowledgeable about birds	Went on an expedition to Australia last year.	A very serious person. He became ill in Australia but is now better.

Example 2 Who Did It?

Here are 13 clues that you will need to solve a murder.

1. Mr Tang died at midnight.
2. The police found a knife. The knife had Mr Tang's blood on it.
3. The bullet in Mr Tang's leg came from Mr Chen's gun.
4. A night-watchman saw Mr Chen go into Mr Tang's house at 11.00 pm.
5. Mr Li's son broke both legs in a traffic accident last week.
6. A night-watchman saw Mr Tang at 11.15 pm.
7. Mr Li hated Mr Tang because Mr Tang knocked over Mr Li's son in a car accident last week.
8. The police found a gun. The gun belonged to Mr Chen.
9. Mr Chen hated Mr Tang because Mr Tang was a better businessman. All Mr Chen's customers went to Mr Tang's shop.
10. Mr Tang's body had a bullet hole in the leg.
11. A night-watchman saw Mr Li go into Mr Tang's house at 11.45 pm.
12. Mr Tang's body had a knife wound in the back.
13. The knife had Mr Li's fingerprints on it.

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1. Using these 13 clues find out the answers to these questions.
 1. Who murdered Mr Tang?
 3. When did he murder Mr Tang?
 2. How did he murder Mr Tang?
 4. Why did he murder Mr Tang?
2. Then write a brief passage describing what took place between 11.00 pm and midnight.
Start your story by writing out Clue 4.

(Adapted from an exercise in Stanford and Stanford 1969)

Example 3

Student A : Your map shows the positions of some of the oceans, seas, rivers and mountain ranges listed below. Your partner's map shows the position of the other oceans etc. listed below. Work with your partner so that you can both complete your maps. Do not look at your partner's map.

Student B : Your map shows the positions of some of the oceans, seas, rivers and mountains ranges listed below. Your partner's map shows the positions of the other oceans etc. listed below. Work with your partner so that you can both complete your maps. Do not look at your partner's map.

The list (given to both students)

The Mississippi River	The Alps	The Black Sea
The Amazon River	The Andes	The Red Sea
The Nile River	The Rockies	The Atlantic Ocean
The Ganges River	The Himalayas	The Pacific Ocean
The Huang He River	The South China Sea	The Indian Ocean
The Chang Jiang River	The Mediterranean Sea	

Each student is given a map. Student A's map shows the positions of half of the geographical features mentioned above. Student B's map shows the positions of the remaining half.

(Interlink 1983)

Although similar, there are some differences in these exercises. In the first one, all the students, working in groups, are given all the information and have to make an intelligent decision based on that information. The second exercise can be dealt with in the same way,

or, alternatively the class can be divided up into small groups so that the transfer and completion of information becomes necessary before the group can solve the problem. The third exercise is one of the information transfer type and should be done in pairs or trios. One principle, however, is common to all these exercises and it is that by communicating with each other, the students will be able to complete tasks.

While the learners are engaged in such exercises, it is anticipated that they will make grammatical mistakes. However, because the aim of these exercises is to encourage the learners to communicate, grammatical mistakes made by the students should go uncorrected by the teacher. There are several reasons for this:

(1) Learners cannot help but make grammatical mistakes when engaged in fluency exercises.

(2) Any correction will disturb the nature of fluency exercises. Trying to communicate becomes impossible if someone else keeps interrupting you and telling you that you have left an article out or got a tense rather wrong.

(3) Interrupting people to correct their grammar when they are trying to communicate will make these people unwilling to try to communicate. Once that happens and the learners become embarrassed or frightened of the consequences of trying to communicate, then the whole aim of fluency exercises is lost.

This whole area of learners' feelings towards language learning in general and communicating in particular is of crucial importance. Krashen (1981) argues that what he calls the low affective filter is a feature that encourages language acquisition and that learners should therefore never be put on the defensive. Furthermore, he and Terrell argue that "the affective filter is very high among adolescents. Peer evaluation is probably the single most important factor in the behaviour of an adolescent. Therefore it takes a very talented teacher to create an atmosphere favourable for acquisition among a group of young teenagers" (1983, p. 179).

Schumann (1978) in research on Spanish speaking immigrants in the United States who had failed to learn English, argued that sociocultural and affective factors were the key causes of their failure.

A related classroom atmosphere where students are not frightened or feel worried about embarrassing themselves is there-

fore not only a 'nice' thing for the teacher to try and establish but also a vital one as it will help students learn, especially if these students are secondary children and young teenagers.

This then provides us with another powerful reason for using fluency exercises in the secondary classroom as they will, if handled correctly, help create a relaxed atmosphere. Furthermore, in situations where students are, to slightly alter a phenomenon noted by Abbott (1981), learning English for no obvious reason and are therefore not highly motivated to learn English, fluency exercises, with their emphasis on communication and task completion, can help provide 'internal' motivation. In other words, the materials themselves can provide motivation that is originally lacking in the students.

Morrow has argued that functions can play a role in this type of teaching and in providing motivation for students as:

learning to socialise is learning to do something. It provides an opportunity for learning the language in use (Johnson and Morrow 1981, p. 55).

I am sure this is true in certain learning situations but I wonder whether Singaporean secondary schoolchildren would readily perceive the use of learning to socialise, as this is done in peer groups and children have their own registers and varieties for this. In Singapore, I feel that fluency exercises are more likely to be motivating as students can feel that they have accomplished specific tasks. This also holds true for a wide range of other exercises I have not mentioned. These include listening comprehension exercises, exercises designed to help students 'read' a variety of text types, and writing exercises such as form completion and so on. These latter exercises are well known to teachers so I do not intend to talk in any detail about them here, although some examples of these exercises are included in the Appendix.

To sum up this section of the paper, I have tried to convince the readers that fluency exercises be seen as a vital part of any language teaching course. They help students in their attempts to communicate; they create a relaxed classroom atmosphere; and they provide motivation for the students. They are particularly vital for secondary school courses that are based on a grammar based

syllabus.

I should now like to turn to the final section of this paper and consider the way communicative language teaching can help school children develop cross cultural awareness and learn certain communicative strategies of the language(s) they are learning.

Communicative Language Teaching and Communicative Strategies

The goal of communicative language teaching is to help students become communicatively, as well as linguistically, competent. When I was working for the British Council in Hong Kong, I came across this example of someone who was linguistically but not communicatively competent. A Chinese police constable goes to ask his expatriate officer for a day's leave.

Chinese Police Constable : (CPC) Sir?

Expatriate Officer : (EO) You what is it?

CPC : My mother is not very well sir

EO : So?

CPC : She has to go into hospital sir

EO : Well, get on with it. What do you want?

CPC : On Thursday sir

EO : Bloody hell then, what do you want?

CPC : Nothing sir

Obviously communication broke down here but the question was why. Leaving aside for the moment aspects such as insensitivity and rank, I wondered whether communication had broken down because the CPC had sequenced his request in the wrong way. I then asked the EO how he would expect someone to ask for a day's leave. The result was this:

CPC : Excuse me sir

EO : You what is it?

CPC : I'd like to request a day's leave for Thursday this week, please sir.

EO : I see. Why?

CPC : Well, my mother has to go into hospital on that day sir, and I'd like to go with her to make sure everything is all right

EO : OK then

CPC : Thank you sir.

The crucial difference between what the BO wanted and what he actually got seemed to be that he wanted the request to be signalled early but in the actual dialogue the request is not explicitly signalled at all.

This suggested that it might be interesting to investigate whether Chinese speakers order information in a different way from English speakers, and if so, whether they use their L1 communicative strategies when they speak English. This seems likely as, as Oenpertz (1979) has pointed out, many people, even when they have an excellent command of the structural patterns of a second or foreign language still use the communicative strategies of their first language when using the second or foreign language. This might then help explain why certain stereotypes of the Chinese — that they are inscrutable, never get to the point, etc — are held by many English speakers. Consider, for example, these remarks made by Kaplan (1972) about the essays of Chinese students: (by an English standard of rhetoric) "the essays are characterised by an inability to get to the point and stick with it" (p. 60).

I, together with Yip Hon Yuen of the Chinese Studies Department at the Institute of Education in Singapore, have recently been engaged in research in this area, and although much more research needs to be done, it does appear that Mandarin speakers and English speakers prefer to use different ways of sequencing information when they are, for example, making suggestions or recommendations. Below is a literal translation of a Mandarin speaker's arguments for the adoption of new teaching methods:

Wu: As for this point, there's an area I don't agree with...(teacher) Lin mentioned the adoption of traditional teaching methods, (well) if we take history, in general, traditional teaching consists of the teacher reading, the students listening, then they go home and memorise the things that are coming up in the exams, (well) I feel this...as for students, comparatively intelligent students and who have good memories and especially in the case of girls, this method* doesn't cause problems but for students who aren't so intelligent, I think that this approach* causes serious problems. Because of this, talking about a subject like history students, if the teacher himself does nothing to arouse students' interest, I think that the students' listening is also very boring. (therefore) as for this subject history, they naturally don't have any interest in it.

(Therefore) if we adopt new teaching methods, things will be different, because we can have group discussions can't we? Let's put forward a question... why was the American Civil War as it was... or why was the war in South East Asia as it was. Students may then have their own point of view, and can themselves put forward questions. I think that if we have these kinds of teaching methods, perhaps, students will become more interested. (Therefore) as far as students are concerned, it is better to have these methods.

This paper is not the place to go into a detailed analysis of this data, but I would like to point out that Wu has provided his listeners with a great deal of 'old' information before he actually says: (therefore) "if we adopt new teaching methods, things will be different."

This phenomenon of piling up pieces of 'old' information — what Yip and I have called "topic stacking" — we have discovered to be very common in Mandarin. If Mandarin speakers use this strategy when they speak or write English, this may provide a reason why the essays of Kaplan's Chinese students are characterised by "an inability to get the point and stick with it".

This has obvious implications for language teaching in Singapore, where most schoolchildren are required to learn both Mandarin and English and have to write 'O' level essays in English. If our present and future research confirm this Mandarin 'topic stacking' phenomenon, then materials written to teach Mandarin speakers the information sequencing strategies of English are needed — and vice versa of course.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to argue that Singapore's grammar based syllabus and communicative language teaching need not be enemies but can work together quite happily. However, I have also stressed the importance of the role fluency exercises should play to complement "communicative grammar teaching". Finally, I have suggested that, in addition, to grammar teaching and fluency exercises, materials designed to help Mandarin speakers learn certain communicative strategies of English and to help English speakers learn certain communicative strategies of Mandarin would be very useful.

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APPENDIX Examples of Exercises

1. Listening-comprehension. Tapescript and Worksheet

The Principal's Talk — Tapescript

Principal: Well, good morning everybody. I hope I won't keep you waiting too long today, as I notice that the weather isn't very good, and I'll...uh...try and finish what I have to say before it starts to rain. Now, the first thing I have to say, I'm afraid, is rather unpleasant. I've had some complaints from many of the teachers that pupils are making much more noise this term — this apparently pupils are making much more noise this term — this apparently especially in the corridors. Now, you must make less noise — it's very disturbing for classes when they are actually in action and when they're teaching. So please, when you are walking in the corridors, please..., please..., do not make so much noise. Last term, everyone was very good about not making too much noise, I'm not quite sure what's happened this term, but anyway...unless noise drops, I'm afraid I shall have to take some disciplinary action and I really don't want to do that. Now, the second thing is, I'm afraid I'm very unhappy about the standard of dress. I've noticed dirty uniforms.... I've noticed some boy's hair beginning to look a little long. Now I hardly need to remind you, uniforms must be clean, boys' hair — your hair must not cover your ears. Now, you all know this, so ... this is your last warning. If I see anybody with long hair or a dirty uniform again I'm afraid I will have to take disciplinary action. Now, some announcements, the first one — three classes, they are Secondary 1/7, Secondary 1/8 and Secondary 2/8. Please remember, you have your class photos tomorrow. Remember therefore to wear your school ties and of course...clean uniforms and short hair. Secondary 1/7, your photograph will be at 1.45pm. Secondary 1/8, your photo will be at 2pm. and Secondary 2/8, your photo will be at 2.15pm. Please be punctual....Your form teachers will give you any more details that you need about these photographs. Second announcement is that on Friday, there will be a concert at the Cultural Theatre — that's the theatre in Orange Road, near the Marco Polo Hotel. A group will be singing folk songs. Tickets cost three dollars for adults and one fifty for school children, and the concert starts at seven thirty. Now, the final announcement are some sports scores from yesterday. I'm afraid, the football team

was beaten ... and beaten by Swiss Cottage, three — one. Now, we don't like being beaten by Swiss Cottage, so I hope that doesn't happen again. The table tennis team, I'm afraid, was beaten very easily by Jurong Secondary School. But, some good news ... the last piece of news ... the hockey team beat R.I. in a very exciting match, three — two. Well done to the hockey team! Right, that's it for today.

THE PRINCIPAL'S TALK WORKSHEET

Listen to the tape and complete this worksheet

A DISCIPLINE

The principal mentions two problems concerning discipline.

- a) What are they? 1.
2.
b) What actions must students take?

B ANNOUNCEMENTS

EVENT	CLASS CONCERNED	TIME OF EVENT
1.	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.

What do you think would happen to a Secondary 2/3 boy who turned up without a tie and with long hair?

2. _____

EVENT	PLACE	PRICE-adults	PRICE-children	TIME
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What type of music would you expect to hear?

3.

EVENT	OPPONENTS	RESULT
a)		
b)		
c)		

2. 'Reading' comprehension. *How Fast Can He Do It?*

Mr Chen wants to visit these cities and in this order:

Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo Manila Taipei Sydney Singapore

Now look at the information provided in these boxes.

Work out what is the shortest time Mr Chen's journey can take. Explain your answer.

Singapore	Tokyo	Sydney
Hong Kong	Manila	Singapore
Daily flights	Daily flights	Daily flights
Dep : 8.15 am	Dep : 9.00 am	Dep : 2 pm
Arr : 11.30 am	Arr : 11.30 am	Arr : 11.30 pm
Manila	Hong Kong	Taipei
Taipei	Tokyo	Sydney
Daily flights	Daily flights	Daily flights
Dep : 11.45 am	Dep : 11.00 am	Dep : 11.40 am
Arr : 1.00 pm	Arr : 3.30 pm	Arr : 9.00 pm